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ABSTRACT

Assessment is the tool used by educators to determine the beginning skills of a student, to show development of new skills, to increase learning, and to monitor areas needing improvement so that learning is ensured. Though many barriers still remain regarding validity of tests, reforms are being made to include the aspect of environment of test takers and the cognitive styles of students and how these affect test results. The two main types of assessment are standardized testing and in-class testing. In-class testing takes place daily, weekly, and monthly on a small scale, whereas standardized testing includes large scale basic skills, placement, and national achievement tests. In-class testing, the first type, is necessary to the teacher for adjusting instruction to fit the needs of the learner. Standardized testing, the second type, is to monitor quality and quantity of learning and teaching for comparison on a universal scale. In reviewing several articles about assessment, it was found that assessment is generally meant to test what and how well a student has learned, such as in standardized testing, but also that assessment is meant to foster improvement of instructional practices. The purpose of this paper is to show how the planning and delivery of appropriate reading instruction can be based on assessment (Contains 10 references.) (Author)

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Planning and Delivery of Appropriate Reading Instruction Based on Assessment and Evaluation

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Introduction:

Assessment is the tool used by educators to determine the beginning skills of a student, to show development of new skills, to increase learning, and to monitor areas needing improvement so that learning is ensured. Though many barriers still remain regarding validity of tests, reforms are being made to include the aspect of environment of test takers and the cognitive styles of students and how these affect test results. The two main types of assessment are standardized testing and in-class testing. In-class testing takes place daily, weekly, and monthly on a small scale, whereas standardized testing includes large scale basic skills, placement, and national achievement tests. In-class testing, the first type, is necessary to the teacher for adjusting instruction to fit the needs of the learner. Standardized testing, the second type, is to monitor quality and quantity of learning and teaching for comparison on a universal scale.

In reviewing several articles about assessment, I found that assessment is generally meant to test what and how well a student has learned, such as in standardized testing, but also that assessment is meant to foster improvement of instructional practices. The purpose of this paper is to show how the planning and delivery of appropriate reading instruction can be based on assessment.

Literature Review:

Literacy instruction has changed because it is taught earlier. Ability grouping has declined and early intervention programs have been implemented. Additionally, phonemic awareness, fluency instruction, and invented spelling are new, as well as a rise in self-selected reading (Shanahan & Neuman 1997). Minority writings and literature by women are a greater part of the curriculum. Of course, technology has evolved and most importantly to this paper, many new forms of assessment have been invented and implemented.

Particularly, the evolution of large scale assessment is due to economics, politics, and social values, and not necessarily to research (Shanahan & Neuman 1997). However, the smaller scale assessment has been influenced by research, and thus it is better for students and teachers alike. Researching reading helps to improve instruction. The authors of this article searched for studies that have had a practical influence on instructional practices.

Assessment is a form of research, which is important to this article because the authors are discussing research and its role in instructional change. In either case, assessment or research, the instructional change is the outcome and purpose. An example of early intervention is Marie Clay's Reading Recovery program (Clay 1979, 1985) which promotes instruction in the context of real reading and uses the technique of observation as a key part of the assessment.

Karge (1998) suggests portfolios, both for students and teachers, to collect data and strategies for learning. As a writing portfolio would consist of student-chosen pieces, so a reading portfolio could consist of a list of student chosen books and a quick reference guide to the generalizations of phonics and spelling that they can add to each week. Portfolios are good

assessment tools because they accumulate work over time that can be examined for development and growth, aid in time-keeping , provide opportunities for comparison of work and development of projects. Students can also keep reflections about their readings in the portfolios as well as goals that they can attain within the classes.

The teachers can benefit from portfolios because of the weekly time set aside to add new teaching techniques that work, reflect on the achievements of the students and on how well the week went and what improvements could be made. Goals for the teacher can be written out in her portfolio that include all of the validated teaching techniques so that they will be met. Graham and Harris (1988) provide recommendations for writing instructions, which can also be translated into reading instructions, as follows: set aside time for reading instruction; generate a wide variety of reading materials and tasks; build an environment complimentary to reading; integrate reading with other academic subjects; and help students employ effective reading strategies.

This article also focuses on students with learning disabilities and how to mold instruction to fit their needs. This is a perfect example of the results of assessment being used to plan and deliver appropriate instruction because knowing that the students have been assessed and diagnosed as learning disabled then gives the teacher a better idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Instruction can then cater to the learner. Karge (1998) explains that being learning disabled means to have difficulty learning, which I interpret as not atypical of most students because learning is hard for everyone at some time in their life. Karge goes on to state that all children can learn when the types of instruction strategies used are carefully assessed. Karge suggests peer evaluation as a guide to instruction where the students make suggestions regarding instructional focus.

As with writing, reading instruction can be broken into parts that are easily attainable for students with learning disabilities. It seems that strategies for learning are the most important method of teaching because they equip students with trouble-shooting methods they can carry out when reading, especially on their own time. Another important method is making sure time is set aside for students to practice reading.

Assessment and instruction become interchangeable based on the observation of a classroom which can include small-group instruction, large group instruction, partner work, independent work, all of which the teacher can use to verify student learning and achievement and modify instruction based on how the students are learning and the pace.

Bembridge (1992) focuses on the invention of a test by Canadian teachers that matches whole language instructional practices. First, these teachers searched for a published test that met the new criteria they formulated, but when they were unsuccessful they created a new assessment tool. In addition to the standardized criteria, their test needed to be observational and interactive as well as use real, whole, books found in the classroom that do not have controlled vocabulary. After five years they came up with the Multi-Layered Assessment Package (MAP). It is "a set of procedures accompanied by suggested books, transcripts, and retelling and recording forms" (Bembridge 1992, p. 2)

This test is one example of the reforms being made to make assessment more helpful to both the student and teacher. It gives the teacher much more to work with because the many layers and variabilities of a child's development are considered. The whole picture is presented, unlike standardized tests which do not consider all of the important aspects of a child's learning capabilities. MAP tests reading, orally and silent, at this point, but may later include writing, speaking and listening. Other layers are the four cueing systems used when reading:

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graphophonics, semantics, syntax and pragmatics, marked by Goodman, Burke, and Watson (1987). To show its wholeness approach, this test can also take into account physical and emotional health, interest in stories, and motivation to read (Bembridge 1992).

The major difference from other forms of assessment is that the MAP assessment observes reading behaviors within the *context* of the story the child is reading out loud as the teacher listens. Three scores are then calculated; the word accuracy score, the sentence comprehending score, and the retelling score (Bembridge 1992). Making the performance of the reader real is the goal, so that the abilities of the child are not hidden or missed because of testing practices. Two important aspects of the MAP test are that the student's "changes to text" (Bembridge 1992, p. 3) are allowed "if they make sense within the story" (Bembridge 1992, p. 3), and that the books chosen are "not labeled with any type of readability formula" (Zalaluk and Samuels 1989).

A software package from Autoskill International was adopted by Humble Middle School in Humble, Texas. Basically, the program was acquired to aid in quickly assessing and teaching reading strategies because of a high turnover rate, but it turned out to be especially helpful in including and assessing all learners as individuals to find their special needs (THE Journal 1995). This program teaches skill mastery and helps to assess students' reading capabilities and thus combines assessment and instruction. The assessment aspect of Autoskill is like the MAP test in that it determines the specific needs and learning styles of each child and then describes them by type, in addition to assigning a grade level number to the learner. Many different theories work together to make this program unique. Technology aids in the formation of a computer portfolio that keeps records of testing and training histories organized into tables and graphs.

Though these examples of assessment show the general trend of change, the change still lies mostly with theory and less with practice, as described by Dwyer (1998). Performance assessments are being used in state and local assessments in conjunction with the standardized tests. The debate between the two types of testing is similar to the whole language vs. phonics debate, in that the old is being tested against the new. Performance assessments value school contexts and student characteristics just as the whole language resource teachers do in their invention of the MAP test. The focus of assessment now includes cognitive processes as well as subject-matter content as a result of validity studies by Messick and other researchers in fields such as cognitive psychology and science.

It is important to mention that assessment on a large scale is important for instructional changes and improvements because the results can magnify a strength or weakness across the nation and start a national movement towards change or complacency. For example, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Reading Literacy Study assessed the ability of fourth and ninth graders from many countries to comprehend narrative and expository prose and to gain information from documents (Baumann & Hoffman 1998). Results show that U.S. students exceed or are comparable to other countries, thus indicating to teachers that instructional practices, at least in general, are working. In an article about The Great Debate between phonics and whole language, Baumann and Hoffman (1998) discuss the changes that have occurred in the past since the early twentieth century, when a need for greater balance in reading programs emerged. Whole language used to be called the look-say program before Kenneth Goodman renamed it later on. However, the problem lies not with the good effects of either whole language or phonics, but in a lack of balance when one or the other only is used to teach reading.

The results of Baumann and Hoffman's survey found that most teachers agree with a balanced use of both phonics and whole language, and that the debate has been outgrown by most teachers. The article goes on to answer whether the belief that children are reading less well has to do with a switch from phonics to whole language and whether this belief is even true. Many studies have shown the contrary, that reading achievement is still high, despite the politics of whether to use whole language or phonics because teachers are using both.

One thing I learned from reading this article and its teacher responses is that "teachers did not see holistic practices and phonics as a dichotomy, but instead viewed instruction in reading skills and strategies as something they ought to do along with and in the context of more holistic practices" (Baumann & Hoffman 1998, p. 6). In other words, there is no separation, but instead a blending of the two practices. From this assessment of teachers I have learned a way of changing my own views on instruction.

Summary/Conclusion:

In recent years many changes in educational practice have taken place, the greatest of which seems to be a shift in philosophy to include a broader view of the way children learn. The new types of assessment have reflected this change and thus consider more aspects of the educational experience. The relation of assessment to instruction is only one small part of the entire picture, but clearly a key factor in overall improvement. The result is an inclusion and accommodation of all students through a multiplicity of strategies for teaching and learning.

In addition, interchangeable concepts, teachers becoming involved in the assessment process through their own inventions, and the use of assessment technology pervade the educational dialogue of today. Though education is greatly influenced by politics, only the teachers can truly implement the changes. Change comes from the bottom up.

Implications:

Change and assessment go hand in hand, meaning that another way of thinking of this topic is by understanding assessment as basically a process that elicits change. Results are integral to the process of assessment and only teachers are able to interpret the whole process of assessment to children so that their individuality shines through, not just their sameness.

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